

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Arvin-Edison Water Storage District and Metropolitan Water District 2010-2011 Water Exchange Project

FONSI-10-38

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Introduction

In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, the South-Central California Area Office of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), has determined that the approval to exchange Arvin-Edison Water Storage District's (AEWSD) Central Valley Project (CVP) supplies with Metropolitan Water District's (MWD) State Water Project (SWP) supply is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. This Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) number EA-10-38, *Arvin-Edison Water Storage District and Metropolitan Water District 2010-2011 Water Exchange Project*, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Reclamation intends to provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the Draft FONSI and Draft EA during a 15-day public comment period.

Background

In December 1997, AEWSD entered into a long-term Water Management Program (Program) with MWD. Under the Program, up to 350,000 acre-feet (AF) of MWD's SWP supply could be banked within AEWSD's groundwater bank at any one time. Upon request, AEWSD would return MWD's banked SWP water during certain dry hydrological years when MWD needs to supplement its water supply. AEWSD has historically pumped MWD's banked SWP supplies from their groundwater bank and delivered the water back to MWD. In anticipation of the State Water Resources Control Board's (SWRCB) approval to temporarily consolidate the SWP and CVP places-of-use and points-of-diversion, AEWSD proposes to send up to 40,000 AF total of their 2010 and/or 2011 CVP water supplies to MWD in lieu of extracting MWD's previously banked SWP water within AEWSD's groundwater bank as originally agreed and analyzed under the Program. As a result, a like-amount of MWD's banked SWP water would change in ownership over to AEWSD, thus completing a "bucket for bucket" exchange.

The exchange would utilize existing facilities including the CVP, SWP, Cross Valley Canal (CVC), and/or AEWSD's facilities. AEWSD's CVP supply from Millerton Lake would be conveyed down the Friant-Kern Canal (FKC) towards the terminus and diverted into AEWSD's facilities via AEWSD's FKC turnout at milepost 151.80 or AEWSD's intake canal off the CVC. Once in the CVC or AEWSD's facilities, the water would be introduced into the California Aqueduct at existing diversion points and ultimately delivered to MWD. At their discretion, AEWSD would extract the water obtained through the exchange using existing facilities to satisfy the irrigation needs of landowners within the district.

The exchange would be completed by February 28, 2012 (end of 2011 contract year); however, would be limited to and would only occur during the timeframe for which a temporary consolidated place-of-use and point-of-diversion is approved by the SWRCB. It is anticipated that the SWRCB would approve the temporary consolidation for one year.

Findings

Water Resources

The Proposed Action is merely an extension of the Program and would not significantly impact the Program's ability to continue operating as has historically occurred.

The Proposed Action would not require the San Joaquin River Restoration Program to increase, decrease, and/or change the timing of flows released from Friant Dam nor would it significantly impact interim flows and recirculation projects.

Both AEWSD and MWD would not experience a net gain or loss in their respective water supplies under the Proposed Action since the exchange would be "bucket for bucket". AEWSD would still have sufficient water resources to provide to their landowners for agricultural purposes and MWD would use this water to supplement their reduced SWP supplies in order to meet its customers' demand for municipal and industrial use. There would be no significant impacts to AEWSD and MWD's respective water supplies.

The Proposed Action would not increase groundwater pumping from what has historically occurred within the Kern County Subbasin by AEWSD. Aside from the 10 percent loss factor left in the groundwater bank as part of the Program, there would be no net gain or loss to groundwater levels underlying AEWSD from implementing the Proposed Action. There would be no measurable changes to the groundwater basin underlying MWD since the water would be used for municipal and industrial purposes, and little, if any, water would seep into the groundwater basin. There would be no significant impacts to groundwater resources.

The CVC, FKC, and California Aqueduct would not be significantly impacted as the Proposed Action must be scheduled and approved by Reclamation, Kern County Water Agency (KCWA), and DWR so as not to hinder these agencies respective obligations to deliver water to their contractors and other obligations. In continuance of commitments from the Program, existing water quality guidelines would followed by both AEWSD and KCWA when introducing water into the California Aqueduct to insure that water quality would not be significantly impacted.

Land Use

The Proposed Action would utilize existing facilities to convey waters involved and would not require the need to construct new facilities or modifications to existing facilities that would result in ground disturbance. AEWSD would not experience a decrease in water supply that would impact existing irrigated farmlands within its service area, nor would the banked water be used to cultivate native or fallowed land for three or more years. MWD intends to use the exchanged water to supplement its SWP supplies for existing municipal and industrial purposes within its service area, and would not contribute to any potential expansion within the area. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not have significant impacts on existing land use.

Biological Resources

Most of the habitat types required by species protected by the Endangered Species Act do not occur in the project area. The Proposed Action would not involve the conversion of any land fallowed and untilled for three or more years. The Proposed Action also would not change the

land use patterns of the cultivated or fallowed fields that do have some value to listed species or birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Since no natural stream courses or additional pumping would occur, there would be no effects on listed fish species. No critical habitat occurs within the area affected by the Proposed Action and so none of the primary constituent elements of any critical habitat would be affected. There would be no significant impacts to biological resources.

Cultural Resources

All exchanges would occur through existing facilities and water would be provided within existing service area boundaries to areas that currently use water. The Proposed Action would not result in modification of any existing facilities, construction of new facilities, change in land use, or growth. The Proposed Action has no potential to cause effect to historic properties pursuant to the regulations at 36 CFR Part 800.3(a)(1); therefore, would not significantly impact cultural resources.

Indian Trust Assets (ITA)

The exchange between AEWSD and MWD would not involve any construction on lands or impact water, hunting, and fishing rights associated with the nearest known ITA. Therefore, the Proposed Action does not have the potential to significantly impact ITA.

Indian Sacred Sites

The Proposed Action involves exchanging water and utilizing existing conveyance facilities. No construction or ground disturbing activities would be required that would impact known Indian sacred sites and/or prohibit access to and ceremonial use of this resource. There would be no significant impacts to Indian sacred sites.

Socioeconomic Resources

The Proposed Action would result in less energy use with virtually no changes in flow path from what was analyzed under the Program. This would save AEWSD the energy and costs associated with otherwise pumping and returning groundwater, in addition to saving expenses associated with operating their recharge basins. There would be minor, short-term beneficial impacts to socioeconomics.

Environmental Justice

The Proposed Action would not cause dislocation, changes in employment, or increase flood, drought, or disease within the affected environment. The Proposed Action would not disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged or minority populations. Water so delivered under the Proposed Action would primarily serve to reduce energy use with attendant cost savings and would also allow AEWSD greater instantaneous access to water supplies to meet summertime peaking demands, therefore securing agricultural jobs in the region. There would be no significant impacts to environmental justice.

Global Climate

Green house gases (GHG) generated by the Proposed Action is expected to be extremely small compared to sources contributing to potential climate change since the exchange of water would be conveyed mostly via gravity and little, if any, additional pumping from electric motors would

be required. While any increase in GHG emissions would add to the global inventory of gases that would contribute to global climate change, the Proposed Action would result in potentially minimal to no increases in GHG emissions and a net increase in GHG emissions among the pool of GHG would not be detectable. There would be no significant impacts to global climate.

Cumulative Impacts

Similar to an exchange approved in 2009, the Proposed Action is an extension of the Program between AEWSD and MWD. Both the 2009 exchange and the Proposed Action are/were temporary actions, which allowed AEWSD to provide for the timely delivery of surface water to MWD in order to fulfill its obligation under the Program in-lieu of pumping and returning groundwater to MWD. Since the Proposed Action and the 2009 exchange are extensions of the Program, the Program could then be used to determine potential cumulative impacts. The Program itself is a long-term action that was determined to not have significant impacts on environmental resources.

There would be no net gain or loss to either district's water supplies since the exchange would be "bucket for bucket". Groundwater pumping would not increase or decrease as a result of the Proposed Action. The Program slightly benefits the groundwater levels underlying AEWSD since 10 percent of MWD's SWP supplies banked are left in the groundwater subbasin. Utilization of conveyance facilities involved would require coordination with the appropriate overseeing agency to insure that the scheduling of the Proposed Action would not hinder the normal operations of those facilities. The same water quality monitoring protocols would be followed in continuance of the Program to ensure that water quality in the California Aqueduct is not adversely impacted. The Proposed Action would not require any change or modifications to the SJRRP's interim flows or recirculation projects and would not contribute to or impact the program's directives, programs, and objectives. There would be no significant cumulative impacts to water resources.

The Proposed Action would have no impact on land use, biological resources, cultural resources, ITA, Indian sacred sites, and environmental justice; therefore, would not contribute to significant cumulative impacts on these resources areas when taking into consideration other past, existing, and future actions. Slight beneficial impacts to socioeconomics would be short-term and within the historical variations, and therefore would not contribute to significant cumulative impacts.

GHG impacts are considered to be cumulative impacts. The Proposed Action, when added to other existing and future actions, would not contribute to significant cumulative impacts to global climate change owing to the threshold magnitude of GHG emissions requirement for reporting.

The proposed exchange would only occur within the timeframe specified for the consolidation for the CVP and SWP places-of-use and is not precedent setting. The Proposed Action, when added to other actions, do not contribute to adverse increases or decreases in environmental conditions. Overall, there would be no significant cumulative impacts caused by the Proposed Action.